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PROCEEDINGS OF  
**THE PHRENOLOGICAL SOCIETY**

*Of Washington, relative to two lectures against the science of Phrenology, delivered at the Columbian College by Dr. Thomas Sewall, Professor of Anatomy and Physiology, in May, 1826.*

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## PREFATORY NOTICE.

The form in which the following sheets are presented, has been deemed necessary to counteract the effects that the lectures, therein noticed, were ostensibly intended to produce: as well as to shew the assiduity and zeal on the part of the members to meet, and, if necessary, to rebut any opposition, whether anatomical, physiological, pathological or psychological to this system of mental philosophy. The opposition in the present instance, though unexpected, originating from *apparently* so respectable a source, could not be but otherwise hailed as a harbinger of further fruitful investigations in the cause of *truth*,—the object of the society; and has been encountered as promptly and as consistently, as the interest of the institution would admit; and if it has not been rebutted, it will be seen to proceed from causes beyond the control of the society.

## PROCEEDINGS.

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SATURDAY, 27th May, 1826.

At a special meeting of the Society, called this day, the following resolution was adopted :

Whereas, it has been represented to the members of this Society, that Doctor Thomas Sewall, Professor of Anatomy in the Columbian College of this District, did lately deliver in said college, two lectures connected with the subject of Phrenology; and as the object of this Society is "The study of the mind, particularly in reference to its connection with corporeal phenomena," it behooves us to give a respectful attention to any observations, either for or against the science: Therefore, be it resolved, that the Corresponding and Recording Secretaries be a committee, to wait upon, or write to, Dr. Sewall, and respectfully request him, in the name of the Society, to have the above mentioned lectures published, or to furnish a copy of the same for the use of the Society.

The Society adjourned.

TUESDAY, June 6th, 1826.

The Society met agreeable to notice, to receive the report of the committee, which was made by Dr. Randall, as follows :

The committee to whom the resolution of the Society in relation to the lectures of Dr. Sewall, passed on the 27th May, was referred, beg leave to report:

That in compliance with the directions of the Society, they enclosed the resolution with a note, to which they requested Dr. Sewall's immediate attention.

In answer to this note the committee received the following letter, in which Dr. Sewall declines either publishing, or furnishing a copy of his lectures, for reasons therein stated.

To the Corresponding and Recording Secretaries of the Washington Phrenological Society.

GENTLEMEN:

I have just received your note, communicating the vote of the Phrenological Society relative to the lectures I have recently delivered to the students of the Columbian College.

It is true that two of those lectures were on the subject of Phrenology. The object of the one was to exhibit briefly to the class, an outline of the science of Phrenology as it is now taught, and that of the other, to show how far this science consists with the anatomical structure and organization of the brain, the cranium, &c.

These lectures, composed without any view to publication, were not written out at full length, being designed only to aid in an anatomical demonstration. They are therefore in their present state, not prepared for the press, nor in such a condition as to form an intelligible manuscript, which, together with other considerations, necessarily deprives me of the opportunity of complying with the request of the Society. It will however afford me great pleasure to have the attendance of the Phrenological Society at the delivering of these lectures the next college term, of which due notice shall be given and an invitation presented, through you, to the Association.

Be pleased, Gentlemen, to present to the Society, my grateful acknowledgments for the respectful notice they have taken of my labours, and beg them to accept my best wishes for the honour and advancement of an Association, whose object is the investigation of truth.

With sentiments of the highest consideration and respect, I am  
Your obed't and humble servant,

THOS. SEWALL.

*Washington City, May 27th, 1826.*

This communication appearing entirely unsatisfactory, and the committee being desirous to remove all objections that were urged, or might be urged on the part of Dr. Sewall, to gratify the wishes of the Society, addressed to him the following note: in which they propose to him to deliver the lectures, which he had delivered at the Columbian College, before the Phrenological Society, either by invitation, or as a member of the Society.

WASHINGTON, 30th May, 1826.

DEAR SIR:

Your letter of the 27th, addressed to the Secretaries of the Phrenological Society of the City of Washington, was duly received, and they regret to find, that for reasons stated therein, it will not be convenient to you to accede to the wishes of the Society, as expressed in the resolution which was handed to you in our former communication.

The members of the Phrenological Society are desirous to hear the lectures which you lately delivered on Phrenology, at an earlier date than would be afforded by the polite invitation to attend your delivering of them at the next College term. My colleague and myself are, therefore, directed to inquire whether it would be convenient and agreeable to you, to deliver your lectures before the Phrenological Society, at their room, on some very early day or days?

The Society having been established for the purpose of investigating the truth or fallacy of the science of Phrenology, and its members being exceedingly desirous in pursuing their enquiries to hear all that can be said against, as well as in favour of it, would be gratified by your becoming a member of their Association. By this course, all objections to delivering the lectures before the Phrenological Society will be removed, and by thus extending the

field of our investigation, we shall each have a better opportunity of arriving at truth. You will please to give us early information of your wishes on this subject.

Should you decline identifying yourself with the Society, either by becoming a member, or by lecturing in their room, you would, probably, not object to deliver your lectures at some convenient place in the city, where the members of the Society could individually attend, together with many other friends of science, who are anxious to hear your views upon this subject.

We trust that the motives of the Society in thus pressing this matter will not be misunderstood. I beg to subscribe myself for my colleague and self,

Yours, very respectfully,

PISHEY THOMPSON,

*Correspond. Sec. to the W. P. Society.*

To this communication the committee received no written answer; but in a personal interview with one of the committee, Dr. Sewall expressed a desire to become a member of the Society, and his willingness to deliver the lectures in question, before them, as soon as they could be prepared for that purpose. The committee, therefore propose, that they be authorized to confer with Dr. Sewall after his election as a member of this Society, to appoint some convenient day for him to deliver his lectures before the Society; and that the Recording Secretary be authorized to call a meeting for that purpose.

The following resolution was then passed: Resolved, That the report of the committee be adopted, and the accompanying documents recorded with the minutes of the Society; and that the Recording Secretary be authorized to call a meeting of the Society, as requested by the committee.

The Society then went into the election of new members. Dr. Thomas Sewall, nominated at the last meeting by Dr. Randall, was unanimously elected a resident member.

The Society having no further business before them, adjourned.

TUESDAY, July 11, 1826.

The Society met for the purpose of receiving the report of the committee appointed to make arrangements with Dr. Sewall, for the delivery of his lectures. The report of the committee was read as follows:

WASHINGTON, July 11, 1826.

The committee, as directed by the resolution of the Phrenological Society of the 6th of June last, notified Dr. Sewall of his election as a resident member, and requested him to appoint some suitable day for the delivery of his lectures, as promised in the event of his being elected a member of the Society. In answer to this communication from the Corresponding Secretary, Dr. Sewall expressed his gratification at the honor that had been con-



ferred on him, and his willingness to fulfil the wishes of the Society, as soon as he could make the necessary preparation for that purpose: and in a conversation with the Recording Secretary, who had waited on him to ascertain when the Society should be assembled to meet him, he requested two or three weeks delay on account of the great press of his professional duties, promising at the same time to notify the Secretary as soon as he should be prepared.—More than three weeks having expired without hearing from Dr. Sewall, the Corresponding Secretary wrote to him, and reminded him of the expiration of the time he had fixed for fulfilling the wishes of the Society, and again requested him to fix a day for the delivery of his lectures. In answer to this communication the following letter was received:

WASHINGTON CITY, June 26th, 1826.

DEAR SIR:

In answer to your note of the 24th, I regret to be under the necessity of saying, that the difficulty of procuring a recent brain, necessary for my demonstrations, together with important professional duties, will in all probability render it inconvenient for me to address the Phrenological Society, until the autumn or winter. Whenever a convenient opportunity does present, due notice shall be given.

With great respect, I am yours, &c.

THOS. SEWALL.

MR. P. THOMPSON, *Cor. Sec. P. S.*

The report of the committee and the letter of Dr. Sewall having been read, the following resolution was passed:

Resolved, That the committee appointed to confer with Dr. Sewall, be requested to report, at an adjourned meeting to be held on the 15th inst. at 6 o'clock, P. M. an abstract of the facts in the case, and to offer suitable resolutions for the adoption of the Society.

The Society adjourned to the 15th inst. at 6 o'clock, P. M.

SATURDAY, July 15, 1826—6 o'clock, P. M.

The Society met agreeable to adjournment, when the following report was received:

WASHINGTON, July 15, 1826.

In obedience to the resolution of the Society of the 11th inst. your committee have to report: That soon after the close of Dr. Caldwell's lectures on Phrenology, delivered in this city in May last, it was generally understood that Professor Sewall was to deliver lectures at the Columbian College, for the purpose of refuting the arguments advanced by Dr. Caldwell, in favour of that science. Two lectures were accordingly delivered by Professor Sewall, in the presence of the students of the Columbian College, and citizens and distinguished strangers specially invited for that purpose. At the close of these lectures, it was asserted by several gentlemen, whose opinions have great weight in society, that these

lectures contained a triumphant refutation of all the arguments advanced in favour of *that science*, the truth of which our Society was established to investigate. These were the circumstances under which the resolution inviting Dr. Sewall to publish, or furnish the Society with a copy of his lectures, was passed: and this course of proceeding, was the more particularly incumbent on the Society, in consequence of Professor Sewall's having carefully abstained from inviting to attend his lectures, not only all the members of this Society, but indeed all others who were known to have investigated the science, or were disposed to combat his arguments against it. It will be seen by a reference to the correspondence, and the reports of your committee, that the Professor has not only refused to publish, or to furnish the Society with a copy of his lectures, but that after he had promised to deliver them before the Society, and had been elected a member for that purpose, he has, by a course of conduct highly unbecoming the dignity of his station, avoided the fulfilment of that promise; and has finally, postponed the delivery of his lectures until the autumn or winter.—The Professor's excuse of want of time, cannot be admitted; for the Society only asked of him, a repetition of the lectures he had just delivered, which certainly could require but little additional preparation. They asked it too, at that season when the Professor's professional engagements could not have been very pressing. Nor can we admit the sufficiency of his excuse for the last postponement, the want of a recent brain, for we have ascertained from those who were present, that he had no other brain at his former lectures than can be obtained with ease, at any season, and no other can therefore be considered indispensable at a repetition of these lectures. Your committee have further to remark, that the impressions which the Professor has endeavoured to convey, in his letters and conversations with the committee, that these lectures were a part of a course delivered in the line of his duty, and not as he says, gotten up for the occasion; are in direct contradiction to the facts in the case.—They were two isolated lectures, delivered, not at his lecture room, but, at the Columbian College:\* not before his medical class, some of whom were not invited, but, before the students of the college, and citizens and strangers specially invited for that purpose: not during his regular anatomical course, but long after that had been completed. And that these lectures *were* gotten up for the occasion, and *were* intended to do away any impression that might have been made by the lectures of Dr. Caldwell, we have a right to infer, from their immediately succeeding them, and from the acknowledgments made by the Professor's friends on the occasion.

From all this, your committee feel themselves authorized to conclude: That Professor Sewall *did*, voluntarily step forward, as a champion, to do away by his lectures, the impression that had been made in favour of Phrenology, by those of Dr. Caldwell: That *he did* make his arrangements so as to have as hearers those only who

\* The medical faculty of that college, deliver their course in a house situated at the corner of F and 10th streets, in the centre of the city, while the college is located on the heights from two to three miles north of it.

were unacquainted with the science, against which he lectured: That, he *did*, when called upon to furnish this Society with a copy of his lectures, assign an insufficient reason for his refusal: That, he *did*, after promising to deliver his lectures before the Society, and after he had been elected a member for that purpose, evade doing so: And, finally, he has, without an adequate cause, postponed the fulfilment of his promise to such a remote period, as to defeat the object of the Society in their endeavors to correct erroneous impressions, and to shew their willingness to combat his arguments.

Your committee, therefore, propose for the consideration of the Society, the following resolutions:

The Society then took into consideration the resolutions submitted by the committee, and after amendments, adopted the following:

Resolved, That every proper effort has been made by this Society, to obtain from Professor Sewall the two lectures which he delivered at the Columbian College, against the science of Phrenology, or the substance of them; and that their want of success is the more to be regretted, because in conversation these lectures have been referred to as containing a complete refutation of the arguments in favour of that science.

Resolved, That the failure of their application is entirely imputable to the Professor himself, who, in the judgment of this Society, has betrayed an indisposition to expose his arguments to those who have thus manifested a desire to investigate them.

Resolved, That this Society disapproves of the conduct of Professor Sewall, in relation to the said lectures.

Resolved, That this Society deems it inconsistent with self-respect, to make any further application to Professor Sewall, on the subject of his lectures; leaving it to him to deliver them before the Society or not, as he may think advisable.

Resolved, That the Corresponding Secretary be directed to enclose to Professor Sewall a copy of these resolutions.

The Society then adjourned.

### EXPLANATORY NOTE.

At the close of the last sitting of the Society, and previous to a vote of thanks to the committee, the mover, (Dr. Brereton,) of the preamble and resolution of the 27th May, 1826, submitted for consideration a resolution, "That a copy of the foregoing proceedings be furnished to the Phrenological Society of Philadelphia, and to the editor of the Philadelphia Medical and Physical Journal, for publication." While under deliberation, it was generally conceded, that members had a right and were privileged, to take copies of the proceedings, &c. of the Society, and to make any use of them that they deem advantageous to its interests; but that any abuse of this privilege would not be sustained by the Society. Before the question was taken, Dr. Brereton withdrew his motion, and he takes this occasion, as a member, to exercise his right and privilege thus conceded.